

Judiciary Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
H.B. 6321: *An Act Concerning Adoption and Implementation of the Connecticut Parentage Act*
Submitted by: Nicole Sanclemente, Policy and Program Associate; Hannah Halloran, Policy
Intern
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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved and marginalized. For forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate in the development of policy solutions that advance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity in Connecticut.

CWEALF supports H.B. 6321: *An Act Concerning Adoption and Implementation of the Connecticut Parentage Act*.

Parentage refers to the legal parent-child relationship, a bond that is core to a child's stability and security. Legal parentage includes a number of rights including custody, parenting time, and decision making. Parentage also includes several responsibilities such as providing care and financial support.

Connecticut is the only state in New England without protections or paths to parentage for non-biological parents to establish their legal parent-child relationship. Current Connecticut law instead treats certain parent relationships, including in cases where the parent is unmarried, non-biological, or in a same-sex relationship with the other parent, as legal strangers to their children.

The Connecticut Parentage Act (CPA) will ensure that all children have equal access to the security of a legal parent-child relationship regardless of the marital status, gender or sexual orientation of their parents, or circumstances of their birth. Establishment of parentage quickly ensures that a child is secured to their parents for all purposes and increases clarity for all involved in a child's life, which is especially important when parents need to make medical decisions, provide health insurance and other benefits, and ensure that their child inherits in the event of death.

The CPA is especially important during COVID-19 as families continue to navigate increased medical, virtual education, and child care decisions. The CPA also ensures that parentage law in our state reflects and protects the diversity of families in Connecticut and fills in gaps in existing protections.

CWEALF is proud to lead the Campaign for Paid Family Leave, a coalition of more than 75 organizations that advocated for the passage of one of the strongest and most inclusive paid family and medical leave laws in the nation last session. Beginning in 2022, Connecticut's paid family and medical leave program will allow workers to take paid time away from work to care for an ill relative or family member, including those who are related by blood or affinity.

Connecticut's paid family and medical leave law recognizes that the overwhelming majority of households today depart from the "nuclear family" model of a married husband, wife, and their children and is especially important to LGBTQ+ families. The CPA will advance this progress one step further to ensure that families are not only able to care for each other in time of need, but that also increase paths to parentage for unmarried, non-biological or LGBTQ+ parents.

We urge the Committee to pass H.B. 6321 to move Connecticut one step closer towards equity for all of its families.